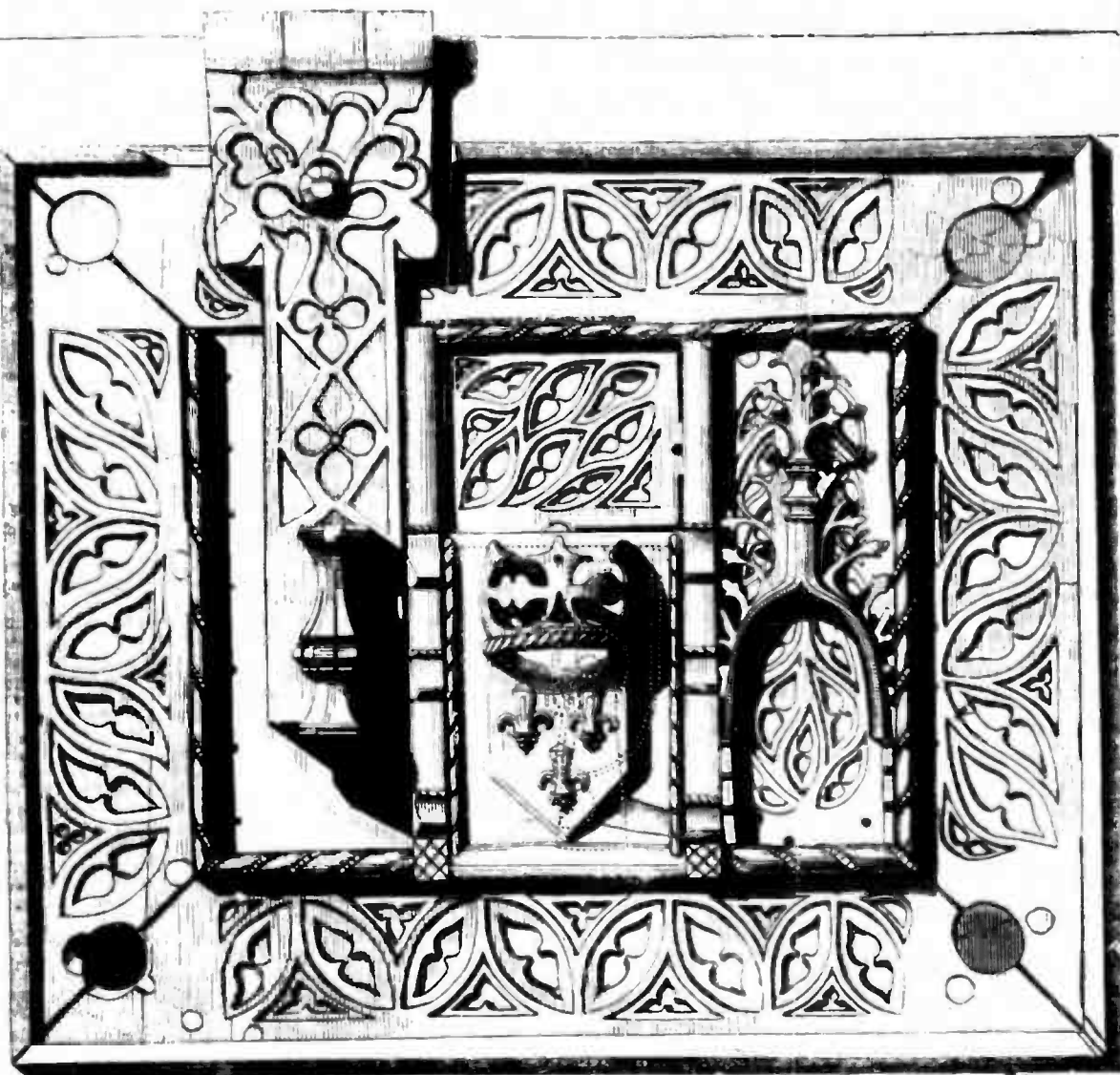


ANCIENT WROUGHT LOCK AND KEY.



THE IRONWORK OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

THE present increasing value of the metals, as applied to constructive purposes, whether in buildings, in railways, or machinery, indicates a remarkable period in the history of science and the useful arts. But it would be difficult to call to recollection any period in which their importance, as materials susceptible of the influence of design, has had so inadequate an estimate. In the last volume of *THE BUILDER*,* this fact was noticed in a leading article, and, subsequently, an endeavour was made to draw further attention to the same subject.† In the earlier periods of the Gothic style, we find that ironwork played an important part in the decoration of the doors, the hinges being, in fact, the only decoration. They covered the whole door in beautiful scrolls, as may be seen at Lichfield and Windsor. At a later period, the material was wrought into equally beautiful forms in locks, latches and keys, sconces, screens, coffers, shrines, with many others. In all these, as before referred to, we discover that particular treatment, which is peculiarly suited to the material, and is also capable of producing a

result greatly surpassing the effect of cast-iron, as at present worked. The subject treated, in each case, seems to have been a labour of love, to one whose ambition it was to engraft the influence of art upon what was the work of hands, but which the result elevated above the rank of a craft.

The lock, which in modern doors and chests is mortised in the wood, was formerly a subject on which the artist exerted all his ingenuity. The early locks seem to have been either padlocks, or to have had the simplest form. But at a later date, when doors and chests were panelled with elaborate tracery, the lock became similar to the example given above. It was sometimes enriched with leaf and scroll work, with ogee canopies and elaborate panelling, sometimes the catch had the figure of a saint, and even the rivets were converted into beautiful forms. The wards of the lock in the examples before us, display no great skill, though we find very ingenious contrivances for security in specimens of later date. The lock of a casket, in the possession of the late Mr. Rhodes, placed on the underside of the lid, has four bolts to shoot in different directions by one turn of the key. But there was often some contrivance to conceal the key-hole in locks of the period under notice. In the *Instrumenta Ecclesiastica*, now in course of publication, there are several il-

lustrations of iron-work, including escutcheons and handles to doors. There is also a drawing of a lock in the chest at Great St. Mary's church at Cambridge, which shews it in its position with the wood-panelling. This example is, however, not equal to the present one, and is drawn with such a character of regularity, that we can hardly think it represents the precise appearance of the old work, which wanting the precision attainable by mechanical aids, and by turning the circles in with compasses, has nevertheless an impress of integrity upon it, which is more pleasing than the unvarying outlines of the machine. To express these points accurately, and in other respects to give a faithful representation, we have made the drawing the full size.

The example here shewn gives an excellent idea of the usual mode of execution in such subjects. The traceried portions, as in each side of the border, are formed of three distinct and thin plates, separately pierced and closely rivetted together. The third plate is uncut in this instance; in many cases the panels were open. The catch has only two plates fastened to a groundwork of the requisite strength; the rivet at the top may not be original. The edges, the twisted beading, the buttresses, the shield, the mouldings of the ogee, with the finial, the crockets, the handle of the catch, are all wrought out of distinct pieces by

* Page 97.

† Vide "Gothic ironwork considered in reference to its influence upon the future development of the style," vol. III., p. 197, and elsewhere.